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'RECONNAISSANCE MYSTIQUE' HOLDING BACK EARTH RESOURCES PROGRAM (Analysis)

Perpetuation of the "reconnaissance mystique" coupled with failure of the executive branch to designate a single agency to be responsible for management and coordination of the nation's embryo earth resources program (ERP) is dealing a potential lethal blow to the effort.

That is the unequivocal conclusion drawn by industry sources who are regarded as being among the foremost experts in the techniques of gathering terrestrial information by means of satellite-borne sensors.

"We are looking to Richard Nixon to bring order out of chaos and get the ERP program on the road," one spokesman told AEROSPACE DAILY in an exclusive interview. The expert must remain nameless as he is a long-time consultant to the Department of Defense on satellite reconnaissance programs.

The reconnaissance mystique is defined as that "grossly erroneous philosophy born in the initial trauma of the U-2 affair, which, nurtured by apologetic Kennedy and Johnson administrations, now literally has painted this nation into a corner with respect to recognizing reconnaissance as a legitimate, straight-forward military mission and not a thing which must be kept in the closet like one's degenerate uncle."

Industry experts decry the current state of affairs where the Air Force is "forced to go around cloaking in a shroud of phoney secrecy their excellent program to ensure that the aggressor nations cannot launch a sneak attack against the U.S. or any other free-world nation."

Cost, Technology Drawbacks Cited

"This," they say, "skyrockets the cost, virtually eliminates any chance of technological cross pollination, not only between military and civil efforts (such as the ERP), but also between military programs using the same basic hardware and effectively precludes providing the public and the Congress with unclassified information."

In the case of the ERP it becomes a real obstacle. ERP sensor-equipped satellites sufficiently sophisticated to gather meaningful data on the health of the world forests, the location of mineral deposits, the prediction and plotting of natural phenomena affecting man's welfare, also are capable of gathering strategic military intelligence. Because of this, it is reliably reported, the word has gone out to "cool it" with respect to getting the ERP program into high gear.

NASA, ESSA and other government scientists who at first demanded the finest and most advanced state-of-the-art sensors for the ERP program now are saying they really don't need the kind of resolution the current state-of-the-art (accelerated by DOD space reconnaissance developments) can provide.

The spokesman flatly rejects this position. "We need all the resolution we can get," he declares, pegging current photographic capability at "1 second of arc from 100 n. mi. (2.9 ft.) and with infrared sensors 10 ft."

"Within 5 years we expect to have the IR resolution down to 1 to 4 ft.," he adds.

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EARTH RESOURCES (Cont.)

ERP program planners, he says, have "been directed to use photographic equipment with resolution of only 10 to 20 ft. from 100 n. mi." This is equipment long-since considered to be obsolete by DOD for satellite reconnaissance.

On the subject of resolution, the spokesman took violent issue with a report in a recent issue of Fortune magazine which alluded to a capability of the Samos satellite gear to determine the rank of a Soviet officer from 300 mi.

"That is just a bunch of crap," he said, "we can't do that now and probably never will be able to."

With current photographic resolution capability at about 3 ft. from 100 n. mi., what capability is required for an effective ERP ? "Resolution on the order of 1 ft.," he says.

Industry thinkers suggest that the State Department and DOD forget their pre-occupation with the so-called nasty connotations applied to reconnaissance and apply "the exact same rationale" they apply to the development of ICBMs, strategic bomers, stand-off missiles and aircraft carriers--that the U.S. never will strike a first blow, that these systems are necessary to protect our security as well as that of other freedom-loving peoples and that we neither have reason to be apologetic nor covert in these actions. Elimination of the reconnaissance mystique could go a long way toward removing the road blocks to the ERP.

Executive action to name a single agency, or create one, with a charter for total management of ERP is seen as removing a second major obstacle. It is reported that actual "behind the scenes warfare" is underway with Interior, Agriculture, NASA, ESSA and HEW, as well as sub-sections of these agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, vying for a "piece of the action" if not full control. Also a powerful and in some cases a dissident force is the "university structure" which feels that ERP might fare better out of the hands of government.

Separate ERP Agency Urged

"A separate and distinct agency to manage and coordinate the ERP is necessary," The DAILY was told, "now during its formative stage and later during the operational phase. It is imperative that the ERP not become the darling of the intellectual community and the bureaucrats. It will be an immense program with immense benefits accruing to mankind but it is going to take a group of hard-headed technologists and businessmen to make it a success."

Peter A. Castruccio of IBM recently told members of the American Astronautical Society, "If earth resources observation satellites are to serve properly the needs of mankind, the information that they gather needs to be channeled through special technical-administrative organizations--users--which represent various facets of mankind's interests. These are in practice specialized government agencies or, in some cases, private concerns interested in certain aspects of resource exploitation."

It appears, however, that someone is going to have to coordinate the program if meaningful information is going to get into the hands of these users.

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GENERAL DYNAMICS CORP., Ft. Worth Div., has received $500,000 from Air Force Materials Laboratory, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, for development of composite stabilizers for the F-111 aircraft. Air Force announced in August it would negotiate with General Dynamics for work on this project.

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CUTLER-HAMMER INC., Airborne Instruments Laboratory, Deer Park, N.Y., has received an additional $52,300 from Army Electronics Command for modification and istallation over a 3 1/2-month period of three AN/TPS-5 radar sets into CH-53D helicopter bodies. The firm received $73,000 from the Army in August for work on this project. Total amount of the contract is thus $125,300.